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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 000223

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SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI FACES CONTINUED INFLUX OF SOMALI REFUGEES DESPITE
UNHCR REPATRIATION

11. SUMMARY: The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports a continued influx of refugees from south and central Somalia to Djibouti. Meanwhile, UNHCR completed the repatriation of 1,853 Somali refugees to Somaliland. END SUMMARY.

REFUGEES FROM SOUTH AND CENTRAL SOMALIA

12. According to UNCHR, a steady influx of Somalis from south and central Somalia continues to arrive in Djibouti daily. Figures collected by UNHCR and ONARS (Office National pour l'Assistance des Rfugis et Sinistrs - the GoDJ office in charge of refugee affairs) show that a total of 2,000 asylum seekers arrived at the Djibouti border since January 1, claiming to have fled the conflict in southern Somalia. This sum totals UNHCR expected projected figure for all 2008.

13. The refugees arriving at Loyada, the main border checkpoint between Djibouti and Somaliland, claim to have paid up to \$250.00 for transportation. Others pay with jewelry or use other valuables and possessions. There have been reports of sexual violence against women during their journey. Those who cannot afford to pay walk the 800 kilometers to find safety and security in Djibouti, particularly since the Kenyan border remains closed and the security situation is uncertain.

14. As refugees reach Somaliland, they are not allowed to stay. At the border point before leaving Somaliland, they have to pay \$50.00. If they manage to get to the no-man's land between Somaliland and Djibouti, they are approached by traffickers who offer to take them to Yemen and beyond, or to Eritrea. Also, smugglers offer services to get them through mountain paths into Djibouti, to avoid the official border checkpoints. The majority who make it to Djibouti among these recent arrivals are young men, who tell stories of leaving their wives and children because the journey is too difficult.

15. On January 27, the UNHCR Special Advisor on the Somalia Situation, Wairimu Karago, visited the main Djibouti/Somaliland border crossing at Loyada, accompanied by the UNCHR Representative in Djibouti and the Government of the Republic of Djibouti (GoDJ) officials. The delegation witnessed approximately 100 south/central Somali asylum-seekers crossing the border.

16. The joint mission met with both police and military commanders at the border, who confirmed the presence of new arrivals in the no man's land area between Djibouti and Somaliland and led the joint mission to the group. With the assistance of the border officials, the joint mission identified 62 families/122 persons all originating

from Mogadishu and its surrounding areas. Most of the group's members were single males between the ages of 16 and 35. There were few women with young children. No unaccompanied minors had been identified among the group. Based on information collected from the group's members, they traveled by road from northern areas of Mogadishu via Galkayo and eventually through Hargeisa, Somaliland. Those interviewed claimed that they had fled from their homes because of continuous fighting and fear of Ethiopian troops. They also added that they could not remain in Somaliland due to lack of protection and assistance. According to the refugees, more people would be heading towards the Djibouti border.

¶17. Border officials reportedly confirmed a continuous daily flow of 30-40 asylum-seekers trying to cross into Djibouti. They welcomed the proposal of having a permanent GODJ presence (ONARS) at the border, to facilitate the prompt and coordinated transfer of asylum-seekers from Loyada to the Ali Addeh refugee camp.

SOMALILAND REFUGEES' REPATRIATION

¶11. On December 31, 2007, UNHCR reported the successful completion of the voluntary repatriation of an estimated 1,853 Somaliland refugees from Djibouti to Somaliland, with the cooperation of ONARS, Somaliland authorities, the World Food Program and other implementing partners. The first six convoys departed from Ali-Addeh refugee camp. The last convoy included 242 former refugees from Holl-Holl. The refugees were taken with their personal effects to a way station, 130 km from Ali Addeh in Djibouti to Zeila Somaliland, that had been built for the reception of the returnees, distribution of food, non-food items and \$40 cash grants.

¶12. COMMENT: Post is concerned about the south/central Somali

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refugee influx, and will continue to closely monitor host government and UNHCR actions to handle the situation. END COMMENT.

¶13. REFCOORD Kent Healy has cleared this cable.

SYMINGTON